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❖ RICHARD CHURCH ❖

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THEME

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VARIATIONS

THE SHILLING BOOKS OF
NEW POETRY

BOOK THE SIXTH



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FLOOD OF LIFE

HURRICANE

PHILIP

PORTRAIT OF THE ABBOT

MOOD WITHOUT MEASURE

THE DREAM

MARY SHELLEY

TO
C. S.

“I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid-battle.”

The Author has to thank the Editors of the “Calendar,” the “Monthly Criterion,” “G. K.’s Weekly,” the “Nation and Athenæum,” the “New Age,” the “Outlook,” the “Saturday Review,” and the “Spectator,” for permission to reprint some of these poems.

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An Echo

DEAR one, dear one, whom you are
I shall not say, for I know not.
The thousand beauties you have been
My eyes have seen and have forgot.
All the wisdom you have known
And shared with me, and put aside,
Even this attribute has gone.
For something of your grace has died
With every moment of our years,
Dying in birth of lovelier
Joys in joys and fears in fears.
Love with you is change. Your love
Is fire consuming in desire,
A strange and dreadful power, a wild
And startled ecstasy, a pang
Of opposites grown reconciled.
You do not know your strength. You take,
And take again, and bind, and break;
And lo! the shard of me that's left
Rings in your hands, both new and round,
Whole as a sword again, a bell
On which an ancient summons rang
Once, and is vibrating still,
Linking our lives with noose of sound,
Deep echoes of an earlier name
Sighed out at night in worlds remote,
Sighed out with joy, subdued with shame.
My ears have heard it, and forgot.

The Pit

AS we stood swaying in the crowded bus,
I felt such utter loneliness, that you,
Heedless of the many who stared at us,
Leaned to my shoulder, just as though you knew
The same dark misery of desert thought.
For a moment thus we stood and touched the deeps
Of consolation, though we knew not what
The agony might be, save that it sleeps
And wakes, raising alternate hope and death.
The empty shores of time, with monotone
Of change and loss, suddenly lay beneath,
Mocking our dumb faith with their vast unknown.
Then we alighted, smiled, murmured good-bye,
And I walked up some Calvary nearby.

An Illusion

WHEN we met again I knew my heart
Was not deceived. Illicit hopes and joys
Clung noisily round you, seven girls and boys.
And you, with so much wisdom to impart,
Tended those dreamborn children with an air
Of such devotion that my fantasy
Seemed flesh and blood. Almost to my eye
Your unknown breast was tenderly laid bare,
Feeding the last of these unsubstanced forms.
I saw it cling where my stilled lips shall dare
Never to supplicate, or sting the fair
And virgin whiteness with love's gathering storms.
We did not speak of this. We could but say
The little pleasantries of everyday.

Her Stature

ONE-TIME he thought she was a little woman,
And frequently would take her in his arms,
Dolling and petting her for amorousness.
But suddenly, upon a day of crisis,
She stiffened in the embrace, withdrew herself
And stood in a rapt ecstasy of fire
Self-kindled from the hard flint of her soul.
She dreamed a dream before him, of the past,
Mighty determinations, practical deeds,
And virgin enterprise. The dwindling lover
Watched her with a horror of loneliness,
Sinking beneath her silent accusations.
She spoke, but hardly could he hear her words,
For she rose up before him like a column
Of fire, streaming upward into heaven,
Tiptoe, wide-eyed and flashing blue on blue,
Her shining hair a raven prophecy,
Her face a lantern of renunciation
Leading her on to chastity and power
To be a king amongst women, and a queen
Amongst men, and a draught of inspiration
To poets and the desolate-hearted ones
Who from the ruin of senses build new worlds.

Salt

NOW having quarrelled and repaired the breach,
Let us praise salt together. You may think
This but an attitude of emulation
Born of a worship for great Socrates,
Suspected once for the anonymous
Praisers of salt, who figured in the Banquet.
No! You will not think so. I know your mind.
It is familiar as my own. They stand together,
Joint adversaries to rebellious passion;

Sometimes phalanxed, Roman shield to shield,
Against this northern onslaught of the blood;
Such blood as you and I have felt assail us,
The sudden treacheries and artful beauty,
So cold, austere, and yet not to be quelled
By the iron plaques and crooked arms of the mind.
And that companionship through war on war
Has taught us trench-truths. Such are not forgotten
When shambles dry, and lands are ploughed again.
As far as mortals may, we know each other;
Having spilled the ichor from our wounded minds,
Mingled it, and there, upon the field,
Bandaged each other as we paused for breath
In the harsh battle where none ever dies,
But hacks, and groans, and bleeds, being immortal.
Yet oftentimes, relaxing, weak and spent,
We snuffed the sweat and crimson of the foe
And envied that rank heat, and the crude lust
Which all our weary and distasteful strife
Could not put back, but only gave more strength.
But we know darker truths than this, that reach
Past simple loyalty. The treacherous taint
Crept from the foreign camp opposed to us
With songs learned there, that held the rhythm of blood,
And melodies of union. Sudden doubt
Palsied our arms; minds weakly took to musing,
And wandered all unmailed up secret paths.
There followed fraternising with the foe,
Whispered discoveries of lineage
Merging, and more immediate parenthood.
Therefore the struggle was not face to face,
Mind with mind against the surging blood;
But sometimes I would fail you, follow lures
That sang the mermaid's song, and led me back
Down all our human paths to the seashore,
Where once the slimy monster dragged himself,
Reared up, and looked on dry land with an eye

That wearied of the water-broken hues,
And now aspired to drink the light direct.
And sometimes you betrayed that aspiration,
Playing me false with fawning kindnesses
And sultry claims that were love's counterfeit.
After such mutual treacheries we now
Stand here together, having reached the sea.
And in our ears there sounds the sad reproach
As the dark, straining body, fin by fin,
Relapses from the shore, and sinks again
To those dull vistas of marine despair,
The trailing roe, and piscine apathy.
This is the bitter savour vain mankind
Shall taste at last, when all the grotto-potions
Stirred near the Spring, in Aphrodite's garden,
Have staled upon the tongue. That ancient shape,
That ocean pioneer groping its way
Up through the roots of spore-engendered forests,
Was the first herald of the Cytherean,
Who followed soon, upon her seaborne shell.
Our minds have sipped the sweetness from her cup,
And are but cloyed. Now let us drain the dregs,
Giving our heritage the primæval tang.
Old Socrates was wise; he lauded salt;
And later still, drained a more bitter draught.
Come, love, be reconciled, and praise with him.
His final tonic we'll ignore—for now!

Catching the Bus

WHAT? Only these few moments more together,
And nothing cleared; our very cause for meeting
Half fogged in this disturbance of our meeting?
This is too weak for tragedy, but tears
We share. Are they bewilderment, these tears;
Few, hot, and angry drops we drop together?

What summoned us, if not some urge within
Crying for union; not union got by kisses
And that thin prying madness following kisses?
That way would be dishonest, not mature.
No, not denied, but kept till soul-mature.
First, Order has to be arranged within.

Have we that? Scan your heart quickly—quickly!
Words waste a revelation; looks are swifter.
Dumb? Hear my eyes! Fasten there! Swifter
We fly, gazing wider, learning more.
Everything we've gained now. Failure's more
Than triumph; flesh flies as spirit, quickly—quickly!

The bus bears down—but now it seems sand-sunken,
Clogged, held back. The flowing river-water
Stands, and tipping gulls hang tilt above the water.
'Tis we so fierce in flight! The moment's gone—
Wise century! No word said, you are gone.
I stand alone here, travelled, tired, age-sunken.

The Search

GUARDING his breath, he leaned against the storm.
Midnight chimes were lost upon that wind.
He lit his lantern, set it on a form,
Then wrapped himself in all that he could find;
Sacks, a coaching rug, a scarf or two,
And over these a stormcoat, shining black.
Weltering darkness yawned before; a few
Last leaves sped in the flying wrack,
Danced haglike in the circle of the lamp,
Shrill and hectic, then were seen no more.
Sudden little treacheries of damp
Creeping air, threading their way behind, before,

Tortured the candleflame to frenzied flare
And smoky rages, half convulsive death.
But the vast floods of wind and massive air
Flowed on above, leaving the ground beneath
Quilted with seeming calmness for awhile;
And life returned into the troubled flame,
Brought back light, and made the circle whole.
Then while he went, groping as though half lame,
That fragile ring of light would be assailed
By demon darkness once again, and crushed
By invisible hands. Again it failed;
Then, moonlike, waxed anew as the wind hushed.
Up through the woods he strode, and on to the wold,
Where the whin shrieked loud, and the ling whistled
shrill.
He met the assault of the heavens, fold on fold
Rumbling up from the ocean, smiting the hill
And breaking to tumult with uproar and shout.
Crouching over his lamp as over a hoard
Of gold close gathered, and savagely ringed about
With ravening hands of greed, he still urged forward,
Mocked by the tempest, stung by the windrace, spurned
By the thousand voices of scorn that hummed and
thrummed
In the wake of the storm. But still the lantern burned,
And still he fought, with mind and senses numbed.
“Where can she be?” he heard. “Where can she be?”
“Gone! Gone!” he heard within. “She’ll never be
found.”
And all of the mad world that he could see
Was a ruffled, shuddering ring of lamplit ground.
Then, in the trough of the wind, a woman spoke,
Crying her grief on the breast of a man by her side.
Slow, storm-battered, they drifted on, and awoke
To the lantern’s lurid life. He saw her wide
And hair-tossed forehead, and her pallid face
As she leaned in the arms of the man, her eyes upturned,

And he in passion stooping, as though to trace
Gleams in the darkness where their beauty burned.
The couple passed; vanished into the night;
Shone for an instant, faded to shapes of grey,
Then vanished, utterly lost from that circle of light
Where the mice of the house of tempest gathered;
Little flecks of air, and leaves from the fall,
And humble creatures born of the lifeless dust.
The lantern-bearer still forbore to call,
Doubted still that vision swiftly thrust
Into his flickering world of candleflame.
At last he hailed her. But none heard him shout.
The derisive storm returned, snatched up her name;
And from the four sides of the heavens, blew his lamp
out.

The Gift With-held

WHY do you bring this poisoned wine,
In your smile denying
The gift, the kiss, that should be mine,
Given in truth, yet lying?

Have you resentful doubt coiled deep
In the cave of your mind
Where the long-clawed memories sleep
Of loves left behind?

Some half-seared wound burns still? Some swift
Shattering treachery numbs,
So that you shrink, and dare not lift
Free arms now new love comes?

Friend, cannot we together share
The unknown terror, confide
Doubts, lay uncertainty bare,
And stand side by side,

Dear strangers still, each half-aware
Of dark reserves in each
Where sacred incense stings the air,
And love is robbed of speech?

Darkness

NOW the last bird has ended, and the bats
Flitter and twitch about the hazel bushes,
Where the young green grows deeper as light fades.
Now falls the blackbird's song; a little grumble,
And silence gathers round him. From the hills
Sleep comes, and westward droops and sleeps the sky.

Ah! very dim your face has grown—the rose
Is lost in ivory, the warmth in moon-colour;
And those eyes, that lately gleamed with fire,
Are sinking in the night, receding, luring—
But never to be taken, made to yield
Their secrets up with light, as the morning flowers
Shine from an eastern shore up to the sun
Who comes, sea-risen, eager for their love.

Oh, tantalizing love, thus to surround—
Even at the very crest and consummation—
The final joy with darkness—nay, to draw
Most cunningly, with subtle dexterous fingers,
Film after film of light away . . . first light . . .
Twilight . . . gloom . . . then fantasy . . . and last,
Where love should be aflame . . . maddening darkness!

The Rebellion

I. The Question

STEPPING ashore, she looked at him, and held
The proffered arm more firmly than need be,
And he stood calm, not flinching, while she spoke.
“Am I afraid?” she said; and the sun-smitten water
Threw up its pale reflection over her,
So that she seemed to shudder amid flames
Of fire more cold than ice. “Am I afraid?”
Then for the first time since the fever of love
First raged in him, he saw the picture clear,
Saw the first years of wooing, saw her again
As queen of those untroubled days, a wife,
A mother, unquestioning, and yet in soul
Still virginal, still stranger to the deep,
The dark, the terrible—love robed in passion.
Then he had come, and time had gathered round them
Stormily, signs and portents had charged the air,
Deeper the gloom had grown—husband and child
Blind, insentient, not one happy breath
Laboured in the ominous atmosphere that loured
On all the world, for all the world of friends
To prophesy the flash. Those two alone
Went on their way oblivious, and thereby
Barbing the bitterest arrows against the lovers,
Wounding with faith, stabbing with confidence,
Until the maddened couple would have hated,
If hate had not been steeped in fierce remorse
And so dissolved away—only to give
Some quintessential richness to love’s potion,
Which drugged these anguished lovers, filling them
With courtesies, and wistful moods of grief
That made them brood like gods above the pair,
The poor deluded husband and the child,
And pity them with an untold compassion

Half merging into scorn, yet ever falling
Into humility and shame.

“Afraid?”

He walked beside her on the river bank;
And the wide waters rolling to the sea
Took up the fear, and bore it on their bosom,
Frail featherweight, yet not to be submerged.
Then looking at her, he saw her shadowed eyes
Gleaming with showery light, such as in June
Will sometimes sweep across the purple clover,
Breaking between a passing storm, and one
Still billowed on the south. Strangely her face
Showed to his love, that fitful god-possession
Which makes the dearly-cherished more remote,
More unfamiliar than its casual setting.
And dread more deep than wisdom, deeper than hope,
Clouded the picture of their mutual years.
What had he now to offer her, what new
Tumultuous experience—she whose years
Had known the marriage-bed, and motherhood,
And westerling passion sinking in despair?
“Fear nothing,” he whispered, stooping to her hair,
And breathing incense there. And she looked up,
Saw fear reflected in the deeps of love,
And dared not speak. Silently they went
Through shadow-pools beneath the elms, and crossed
Sun-smitten swards; so on through light, through dark,
Both with the painful burden of the past
Weighed down, yet bearing in their fearful hearts
The same, mysterious, immortal love.

II. *The Flight*

Beloved, can you hear me? Take this lantern,
Turn it to the wall, lest the light stray—
Then wait for me awhile. I must go back
For one last look at the familiar things

That prisoned me, for time has made them dear.
And there's a keepsake I would bring away,
And I should like, maybe, to peep—just once,
For the last time, at those two innocents,
Father and—O foolish heart, O cruel,
Cruel lover, coming with such enchantment
That I must rend myself, and live divided,
Giving you all my soul, but leaving there
The mortal part of me, the mother-heart.
I think all tenderness will die to-night;
I pray it may be so, for should I find,
One future day when we're in foreign places,
Lonely and homesick, leaning out together
From some high lodging window in the hills,
Dreaming above the mists and shepherd-cries,
Should I find suddenly my hand astray
Over your hair, in half unconscious pity
—Oh, that maternal gesture would recall
The little, wondering eyes, the quivering mouth
Pleading for comfort—a way children have—
For no reason, no tangible trouble, just need
Of solace, they having so little strength to bear
The burden of the strange surrounding world.
Could love sustain such probing of past wounds?
I have not strength enough to be myself,
Unchanged, and still susceptible to these
Deep mothering instincts. I must crush them down
If you're to hold me, happy and resigned
In the cradle of enchantment you have woven.
Cradle? No! No! that word is false for you!
For what have you to do with things of childhood—
You so mute, so passionate, so cruel—
Oh, forgive me, I am distraught to-night,
I wound you, dear! But think! I leave so much,
For ever! There, there, the lantern, take it,
And wait. Oh, I dare not look again—
No, I will follow you now. Take my hand.

III. *Still Waters*

This is uncertain truly, but the joy
Of danger lurks in every treasured moment
Like fear in beauty. Life would not be thus,
Eager, and pulsing, if in the heart's blood
The passion of decay flowed not, or death
Pressed not upon the cheek's flush with cold pallor.

Now that the agony of parting's gone,
And the fever raised in body and in mind
By acts of counterfeit, day after day
In that unruffled house, where all seemed calm
And sweet domestic candour; while, in truth,
Dissimulation wandered through the house,
Tainting the food, giving the nursery tales
Strange innuendoes, mocking innocence.
That fever soothed by time and change of place,
New environment has fostered hope,
And humbled pride lifts up its head again,
And the heart dares sing its own song to the soul.

Do you remember how we fled that night;
You resolute, thinking you had all to gain;
I, creeping from the wounded house,
A shape half ghostly in my misery,
Shrouded with dread, and shadowed with foreboding?
Do you recall my halting, with the lantern
Swung at my wrist, and trembling as I trembled,
So that the candlelight shook round about you
Curtaining with unreality
A figure which already seemed a dream—
A dream I was giving up my world for, all
My heart's home—but I must not think that way!

I turned back, half relinquished hope—and then—
The wavering lantern gleam grew calm and still;
And the ivy leaves, with all their lacy frost,
And the silken spider threads, appeared again,

Just as the stars and a willow-branch are mirrored,
Lost, and then are mirrored once again,
As the wind's hand shakes the lamplike pool at night,
And then forbears, while the pool resumes the deep
Calm of reflection, stars and willow-branch.

So, in that stability of light,
Courage rekindled, I leaned down, spoke to you,
And touched you for my better safety, thus,
As I touch you now, with a timid hand
That trembles with memory. You took the lantern,
And stood there like a summoning priest, a hand
Strangely and fiercely lit, uplifted, waiting
To take mine, claim me from the home which stood
Immobile in the dark behind us there,
Built on my oath; the walls my faith, the roof
His trust in me, the hearth my motherlove—
O God, let me not think on that!

My friend,
Forgive this pain. Since it must grieve you too,
I grieve for it; but no disloyalty
Lurks there towards our love-compact, that each day
Enriches and matures, as heart with heart
Plumbs unfamiliar deeps, to suffer there
Deep-sea erosion from the tides of the soul.

So paused I there, dazzled by mingling lights;
The soft domestic lampflame, kindly and true,
Ever at hand to guide my footsteps home—
And there, beyond it, distant starlight gleams,
Hardened by frost to diamonds' brilliancy,
With all their lure, and all their mocking coldness.
Which are you? Ah, no, the analogy's false!
What safety had I there, in those dear rooms,
With husband, child, and comfort—and beside,
Dulling monotony, indifference
Creeping over my mind with deadly stealth,

Until hopes, joys, and griefs were all diluted
To half their strength by this strange nothingness
That crept in unperceived, as river fogs
Insinuate, until the morning sun
Throws but a hoar and dissipated ray
On a world that has no substance, line, or shadow?

Yet, strangest of all, affection lingered on,
And lingers still, a morning moon, that gives
A touch of fairyland to the sunlit earth.
Ah, yes, I'll call you now my midday lover.
You must have been dawn that came to me that night
And took the lantern from my timid hand
And led me forth to a life of light and feeling,
A high meridian of love and passion.

I hear now the rustling of the leaves
As we went, you with the lantern leading;
Then the opening gate, and my reluctant pause,
My heart still indeterminate, and then—
The quick catch of the latch—and freedom at last!
You left the lantern there, to burn away
And so be found extinguished—I dare not think
By whom. Call that light a symbol, call it
The old love. There it stood, faithful to us then,
Ironically lighting us to freedom!

Beloved, if I dared, I would return,
And I believe that light would welcome me.
For since we left it there, no adverse wind
Has blown upon it. In your noonday calm
I have prospered, conserving all I brought;
And that compassionate flame accompanied me.
It remains now in the daylight of my heart,
Pallid, immortal, more lily-petal than flame,
Floating on still waters.

Am I weeping?

Panache

IF you would rest, I have a safe retreat.
Cradled upon the midnight of the mind,
There you might sleep, untroubled by the wind
Of daytime thought, that has its fourfold seat
High upon consciousness. The winnowing beat
Of reason's flail-like pinions should not find
Your wearied brain, if, trusting and resigned,
Into my care you gave yourself complete.

And is this love I'd shield you with? Alas!
Such words lack countenance in these harsh days
Of disillusionment. We do not know
What love, and faith, and duty mean. We pass
A humbler mintage in the soul's highways,
So nameless my protecting love must go.

Neglect

HE had not spoken for so many days
That she, in desperation, broke the trance.
She had been sick of body for awhile;
And cried, as women will between the moons,
For comfort, such as frightened children crave.
She cried! But oh, the ghost she had espoused
Replied with echoed words and formal gesture
Whose nice completeness showed he had not heard,
So far away was he upon the heights
Of his own lofty spirit, where the snow
Shone in the sun of heaven with austere light.

"Is there anything to tell?" She touched his arm;
And looked at him with hunger in her eyes;

Looked searchingly, with soundless eloquence
Breaking about her words like an ocean tide
Flooding in past a little human craft
Which gropes its way with caution, lest it founder.
Such was the faltering progress of her speech.

There was a depth of anger in appeal;
And jealousy, that bastard child of faith.
She came with these about her like her children,
As though to point her loneliness, and give
Pathos to her bewilderment. But still
He did not answer; only smiled on her,
All gentleness, yet with as faint a light
As penetrates from those remoter stars
That some unfathomable universe
Lures on in orbits foreign to the Sun.

“What have you done?” she said. “Whom have you met?
I want to hear these things, and follow you
Through all the moments of our separate day.
For you are all I have.” And then he spoke,
Half-warned by her impatient breathlessness,
As though a sunlit gnat-swarm he was watching
Veered suddenly, and then resumed its order
After that eye’s-blink length of aerial chaos.
“All you have!” he mused, incredulous.
“It is not much.” Then added this concession,
“What have I done? Ah, yes, what have I done!”
Then paused, and smiled, and gazed beyond the swarm.

Confession Flouted

IT is not true to tell me you are false;
This is your only lie, to say you lied.
I'll not believe your innocence has died;
Our passions were our only touchstones else.
Come, my friend, your blood with heightened pulse
Throbs toward mine, nor can that flooding tide
By thought of recent ebb be shamed, denied.
For can the sea, the sinless sea, repulse?

Cry rather, with a shameless fling of speech,
That what you did was swift, deliberate,
Chosen with cold intensity of hate,
Taught by divine perversity to prove
Whether by treading depths of hell we reach
Nearer some measure of the heights of love.

The New Evolutionist

LET us improve on nature, and extend
The bounds of lust by reason, making shame
More subtle, and refining on the game
Of ethics. Thus do civilisations end
And spring, each with some newer power to lend,
Teaching the fire an added twist of flame,
Whispering to Earth that all is not the same,
That here's a gift which she may take and spend.

Surely the God in Man would sanction this,
Nor chasten him for self-aggrandisement,
Bidding him wait, evolve with star and beast?
Only by this shall torment change to bliss,
The pilgrim soul emerge from banishment,
And hungry life approach death's waiting feast.

Misgiving

“DO you believe,” I said, “that we did wrong?”
And all her answer was a downward look
And lips that trembled. “Come! Do you think *that?*”
Still no word. And yet I read her thought.
I saw remembrance flood her eyes like wind
Filling a valley with its southern gusts
And lifting up the flowers until they spill
Perfume for very wantonness. I found
No shame therein. And I continued so;
Reading that face which now I knew by heart,
Just as a student knows his midnight book,
That he has pored upon, and made his own.

Thought by thought, like cloud by cloud, went past,
Each with its shower of half-remembered joys;
The first approach, the timid gifts, the words
Falling to silence, ere the touch of lips
Brought lightning knowledge of another world
Where men and women in the strength of love
Moved with the gesture of the ancient gods
Shaping the universe.

Then, after that
Review of great events, and swift assent,
She put the past away, and said, “I *do*.”

The Laggard

IF I should say, “But you are late again!”
With what excuses would you try to quell
The thin suspicion lashing at my brain?
Some accident o’ertook you? Ah! It’s well
To say that water, fire, and air agreed,
Sinking their ancient animosity,
To share in a conspiracy of greed

And snatch you from me with a miser's cry.
Or you may say some family of stars
Beyond the distant Pleiades grew jealous
And closed about you, iron prison bars,
So that fate willed not, though your will were zealous.
I'd take that harsh astrology; await you,
And say no more. But how my love would hate you!

The Annunciation

WHEN in our midnight ecstasy we lay
Drowned in each other, suddenly there shone
A far-drawn lantern. Its beams danced upon
The interweaving waters, making play
Of broken light, that darted every way
Between the waves' confusion. I alone
Saw it. Ere I could whisper, it was gone.
Nor did I speak of it at break of day.

But now you rest your head upon my shoulder,
And hushed with joy, tell of that inward sign,
That concourse of the stars toward the womb,
Summoned by will of the Eternal Moulder;
I see again that lamp, and wonder Whom
It guided to our presence, yours and mine.

Intermezzo on the Viol d'Amore

YOUR love flames like remorse, burning me through.
We've outlived passion, and calm thoughts pursue
Still softer, sweeter moods, as swallows haunt
Their own reflections when the day grows gaunt

And hollow over water, eventide
Draping the expectant greenwoodside
And hushing the disturbances of day
With whispered darknesses and shadowplay.

Such is our latterday communion;
The noon-fires canopied with cool compassion,
That evening verdure of the human soul.
So glows the radiant sunhead in the coal,
Set in the lantern Time; its decadence
Bringing the gift of home for recompense,
Hearth-comfort, and domesticated God.

For what is this craving for the unkempt, unshod;
This grasping against reason at the stars,
But the old savage beating at the bars?

Now we should say that poets and their kind,
Dreamers and primitives who lurk behind
The social phalanx, are not light-ordained,
But fools coquetting with the unrestrained
And lawless infancy of man, who swung
Lemurian ages where the forests hung
Matted and fungoid, overteemed with birth
In earlier days of sun-demented earth.
And we should hint how marriage was a state
Convened for safety by man corporate,
And shudder at the subtle thought that lust,
And sullen mood, and agonising thrust
Of mouth to mouth, and limb to limb, and last . . .
But these are images of terrors past,
Struggle and spiritual paradox,
When mind meets sense, grapples, interlocks,
Both goaded by the same demoniac power
That makes the panther in the forest glower,
And chill the night's blood with his hideous wooing.

These banished, other claimants are pursuing
The channels of our blood, whose pulse is yet
Throbbing in ebbtide of our lusts' regret.
For now we find the aftermath no chill
Recoil upon the little deeds that fill
The story of our youth. Instead, we grow
More passionate in mind as bodies throw
Their last and wearied effort in the cause
Of Nature's unrelenting nuptial laws.
Over the exhausted sleep of sense there rise
Souls charged with deeper lusts and subtleties,
Purged of pudescence and the ruins of pride,
That stifled youth when first experience
Proved love the serpent-twin of greedy sense,
Both charged with double-tongued inheritance,
One, wise design; the other, lyric chance.

We find the love-throes of the universe
Only the foreplay, as the gods rehearse
With sensual pattern, vaster schemes designed
To shake the various barriers of Mind;
Until one Joshua-morn of trumpet blare
They crash, and all the armed thoughts prepare
For the advance into the citadel
Of lofty self, where final secrets dwell.
What triumph then, to enter undismayed
Where statecraft of the first and last is made!

Mind is insatiable, and therefore first
Of all things being, by Life universed.
But like the impatient ocean-tide it creeps
Responsive from profound subhuman deeps
Darker than consciousness—to what strange lure
Of unknown satellite that moves demure
And virginal round some transcendent world
Which round a spiritual Sun is whirled,

And he round what? . . . We dare not tread that path!
But can infinity be closed in wrath?
We'll venture then, but to such mental height,
We drop the mind's equipment in our flight,
And from that transcendastral journey come
Back to this human niche, triumphant, dumb!

That creeping tide no mortal can turn back.
Creed and morality are but the track
It carves in chaos' quicksands, and thereby
Is shallowed for the twinkling of an eye;
When, with doubled decuman and surge,
It roars o'er its self-created dam, to urge
Its outer and its mid-deep swell to expunge
The momentary bastion, and plunge
The god, the law, the statecraft into deep
And monster-haunted waters trailing sleep.

Hark now! I mute my strings, and shape my hand
To music that your heart will understand
Without the cold interpretation wrought
By that judicious foreign agent, Thought.
I am content to have proven with those chords,
Love's open instrument speaks more than words.

But, ere we sing the quieter things of home,
Let us rejoice like gods, that we can come
Through turgid raptures that flesh festers by
And emerge therefrom to this mind-ecstasy,
Whereon we see the impulse of our lust
Leap unassuaged and sweep the stars to dust.
The tide of life that shook our limbs, we find
Shakes now the stronger muscles of our mind.
Tossed in creation's all-consuming might,
Who can believe that death is pulseless night?
Twice we have fallen, in body and in brain;
And now our fortresses of soul remain

Solitary, facing on the flood
That rises past the confines of our blood,
Leaving those channels arid and explored.
What further onslaught will the waves afford;
And if the individual soul be shaken,
What eyes shall see the visions, what voices waken
The ramparts of eternity with long
Antiphonies of joy and echoing song?

Now, having tuned my intermezzo thus,
I'll sing of children time has promised us;
And leave these questionings of life's inane
To some more deeply star-bewildered brain.
Contented now with mysteries at home,
I'll watch the strange fruits of our life-love come.
It may be, as they snuggle at your breast,
That mother-mystery will solve the rest!

Night

LEAVE me! Leave me! Let me rest
In the night's slow-heaving breast;
Kiss the solitude, and creep
Where the stars lie netted deep,
Shivering veils that half disclose
The warmth, the life, that ebbs and flows
Through the bosom which they fold
From my kisses, mortal-cold.
Could I touch that mother-flesh,
Freed of substance-veil and mesh,
Would the fever of embrace
Lift me from my mortal race,
Give my lips contagious fire
That should sublimate desire
Into music love-caressed,
Dying, dying, on that breast?

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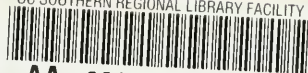
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